

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 062800
ORIGIN AF-08

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY LAGOS

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E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS:CASC, NI

SUBJECT: INTERVIEW WITH KENTON L. HARRIS

REF: LAGOS 2599 AND PREVIOUS

1. KENTON L. HARRIS MET WITH AMBASSADOR, AF/W DIRECTOR AND DESKOFF (PATRICK) MARCH 9 TO RECOUNT HIS EXPERIENCE OF ARREST AND EVENTUAL IMPRISONMENT IN NSO DETENTION CENTER. HARRIS SAID FROM TIME OF INITIAL QUESTIONING IN CALABAR HE ASKED TO BE ALLOWED COMMUNICATE WITH HIS EMBASSY IN LAGOS, BUT WAS TOLD THERE WAS NO NEED TO. HE SAID HE TRIED TO CALL EMBASSY BUT COULD NEVER GET TRUNK LINE TO LAGOS FROM CALABAR. ONCE IN DETENTION AT LAGOS, HARRIS SAID HE DEMANDED TO BE TOLD WHY HE WAS BEING HELD. HIS QUESTIONERS RESPONDED HE HAD "STOLEN" PICTURES OF THE CALABAR AIRPORT.

2. HARRIS SAID HE WAS FAIRLY WELL TREATED WHILE DETAINED. HIS PHYSICAL PROPERTY WAS METICULOUSLY ACCOUNTED FOR AND HIS POSSESSIONS, INCLUDING FILM, WERE RETURNED TO HIM UPON RELEASE. HE WAS ABLE KEEP SMALL PERSONAL CASE
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WITH HIM AT ALL TIMES. HARRIS SAID HE SAW AN ARMY DOCTOR WHILE THERE, WHO PRESCRIBED AND LEFT FOR HIS USE MEDICATION HE NEEDED. HARRIS WAS ABLE OBTAIN THE MEDICATION

AT CERTAIN PERIODS OF DAY FROM GUARDS. MEALS SERVED TO DETAINEES FROM POLICE OFFICERS' MESS.

3. HARRIS SAID HE SAW ABOUT 15 OTHER DETAINEES WHILE CONFINED, AND ESTIMATED THAT DETENTION CENTER AT OR NEAR CAPACITY ALTHOUGH CENTER WAS NOT CROWDED. GUARDS WORE PLAIN CLOTHES; NONE IN UNIFORM.

4. HARRIS SAID GUARDS DELIVERED HIM TO STREET AFTERNOON MARCH 7 AND LEFT. HE THEN HAILED TAXI AND HEADED FOR AMERICAN EMBASSY. ONCE AT EMBASSY EVERYONE WITH WHOM HE CAME IN CONTACT WAS COURTEOUS AND EXTREMELY HELPFUL.

5. HARRIS SAID AMONG OTHER DETAINEES HE HAD SEEN CANADIAN (WHOSE NAME HE DID NOT RECALL) AND IVORIAN SAINT-CLAIR AKAYAO. AKAYAO HAD ALREADY BEEN HELD FOR FEW WEEKS AND SPOKE PASSABLE ENGLISH. AKAYAO TWENTY-SIX YEAR OLD MALE WHO GAVE ADDRESS AS B.P. 10227, ABIDJAN

R.C.I.

6. HARRIS SUGGESTED EMBASSY INFORM IVORIAN EMBASSY OF AKAYAO'S REPORTED DETENTION.

7. HARRIS SAID HE PLANNED WRITE LETTER TO NIGERIAN EMBASSY REQUESTING APOLOGY FOR NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT'S TREATMENT OF HIM. HARRIS HAS GIVEN STORY OF HIS DETENTION TO WASHINGTON POST REPORTER WHO HOPED PUBLISH IT THIS WEEK. REPORTER SAID HE HAD SEEN COPY OF HARRIS' LETTER TO NIGERIAN EMBASSY REQUESTING APOLOGY.

8. COMMENT:HARRIS APPEARS IN GOOD HEALTH, HIS FAMILY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RELIEVED HE IS BACK SAFE. BUT HE IS GREATLY ANGERED BY HIS ORDEAL. HE BELIEVES HIS TREATMENT IMPROVED ONCE EFFORTS WERE BEGUN IN NIGERIA TO OBTAIN HIS RELEASE AND THE PRESSURE OF HIGH LEVEL INTEREST MADE ITSELF FELT HERE IN DEPARTMENT. PARADOXICALLY HE APPARENTLY SUSPECTS THAT USG HAS WAIT-AND-SEE POLICY IN SUCH CASES AS HIS, THOUGH HE HAS HEARD EXPLANATION THAT EVERY EFFORT WAS MADE SECURE HIS RELEASE.
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